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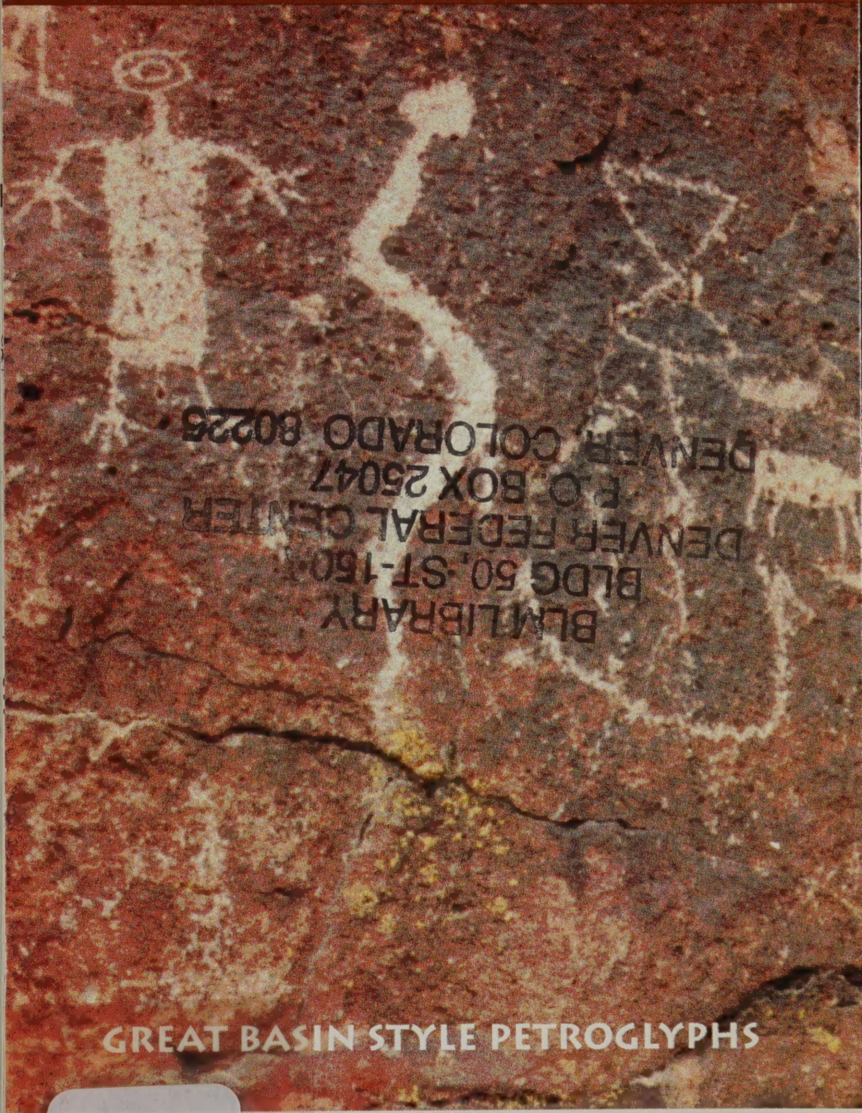
ROCK ART OF NATIVE CALIFORNIA

A Guide to Rock Art Sites on BLM Lands in California

VISITOR'S GUIDE



GREAT BASIN STYLE PETROGLYPHS

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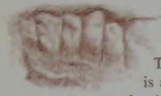


21 - CHALFANT PETROGLYPHS

The last site on the petroglyph loop is a large and unique site. Made on volcanic tuff, the Chalfant Petroglyphs are probably less than 1000 years old, due to the fast rate of weathering for this soft rock.

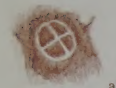
An unusual aspect of this site is the concentration of motifs consisting of circles bisected by short vertical lines. Because some of these are almost carved into the tuff in three-dimensions, it is clear that they are intended to depict the vulva. Vulva-form motifs are absent or rare at most petroglyph sites in eastern California.

The prevalence of vulva-form motifs here and at a few other sites has caused some to speculate about the possibility of a fertility cult. Native Americans deny this. Their comments suggest instead that vulva-form motifs may have been made by certain male shamans for sorcery, because female sexuality was equated with the most dangerous and potentially malevolent kind of supernatural power. For example, menstrual blood was considered the antithesis of benevolent supernatural power, and a series of taboos existed that were intended to protect people from its "dangerous" power, such as a taboo excluding menstruating women from participating in rituals. For this reason, very few women ever became shamans in this region or, if they did, it was usually only after menopause.

***Four-wheel drive required*:** The road into this site, although short, is rugged and unsuitable for a sedan. At the request of the local Native American community, maps and directions to the sites on the Bishop Petroglyph Loop may only be obtained in person at the BLM office.

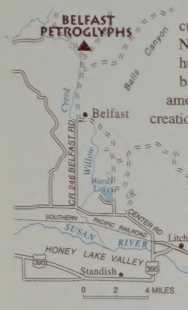
BLM Bishop Field Office
785 North Main St, Suite E, Bishop, CA 93514
760-872-4881

THE CALIFORNIA SITE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CASSP) SPONSORED BY THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, THE SOCIETY FOR CALIFORNIA ARCHAEOLOGY, STATE OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE COMMISSION PLACES A HIGH PRIORITY ON MONITORING ROCK ART SITES.



22 - BELFAST PETROGLYPHS

The Great Basin, Sierra Nevada and Cascades all meet near Susanville, creating a particularly interesting region from the perspective of geography and biology. It is also interesting to those concerned with Native Americans and their prehistory because here we also find the intersection of three cultures: Paiute from the Great Basin, on the east; Maidu in the Sierra Nevada, to the west; and Modoc from the Modoc Plateau, a part of the Columbia Plateau, to the north.

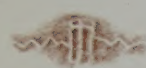


Although there were significant cultural differences between these Native American groups, all shared a hunter-gatherer lifeway and a religion based on shamanism. Widespread among shamanistic religions was the creation of rock art to portray visionary imagery, taken to represent views of the supernatural. The result was that, even if a particular Native American group was not responsible for the creation of a rock art site, they recognized its origin and religious use.

The Belfast Petroglyphs are a good example of a site that may have been made by one or a number of different groups. Note a petroglyph at the north end of the site, created by serrating the edge of a boulder. This may reflect the common incorporation of a portion of the rock face into a visionary motif, resulting from a shaman who stared at the rock during his trance.

Four-wheel drive may be necessary due to sandy conditions. From Litchfield on Hwy 395, take Center Rd west for 4 miles, then turn north on Belfast Rd. The site is about 4.5 miles north, on your left, and is signed. It overlooks a deep canyon and river below (see BLM Eagle Lake Resource Area map).

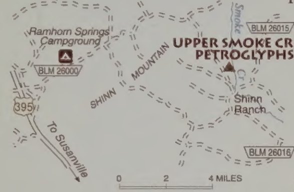
BLM Eagle Lake Field Office
2950 Riverside Dr, Susanville, CA 96130
530-257-0456



23 - UPPER SMOKE CREEK PETROGLYPHS

Euro-Americans "discovered" Native Californian rock art in 1850, when trapper J.G. Bruff sketched a series of petroglyphs from Upper Smoke Creek Canyon, which he encountered while coming to the California gold fields. Upper Smoke Creek is a long, stream-cut canyon running between basalt cliffs, near the Nevada state line. The petroglyphs are dispersed fairly widely along these canyon walls. Falling within historical Northern Paiute territory, you will see petroglyphs here that are typical of other sites in eastern California.

***A short hike from the road to the canyon is required*:** Midway to the canyon is a fenced hill that has been fortified with rock walls. Whether built by Native Americans or the U.S. Cavalry is unknown. But it is a testimony to the fact that the Upper Smoke Creek Valley was one of the last areas of Indian wars in the west.



From Hwy 395 about 21 miles north of the Honey Lake Wildlife Area, take Ram Horn Spring/Post Camp Road to the northeast (marked on the highway by a "Campground" sign). About 6 miles from the highway the road will fork with a sign pointing southeast to Shinn Ranch. Turn in this direction and continue for about 3 miles, until you are abreast of a large, fenced hill on your left, in the middle of the valley. This is the location of the fortifications. The petroglyphs are located in the canyon, which is further east, beyond the fortified hill (see BLM Eagle Lake Resource Area map).

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2950 Riverside Dr, Susanville, CA, 96130
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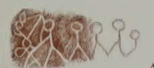
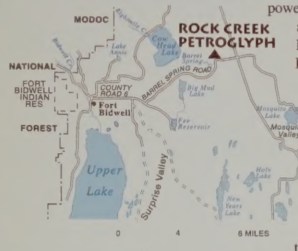


24 - ROCK CREEK PETROGLYPHS

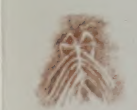
Another petroglyph site in Northern Paiute territory is located on the Surprise Valley/Barrel Springs Backcountry Byway tour. Rock Creek is a dry arroyo/wash that trends through a basalt canyon with low cliff walls. Petroglyphs are present in the rock outcrops on the east side of the canyon immediately north of the road, and also on the cliff faces a few hundred yards north of the road, where the arroyo turns to the northeast.

Almost all of the petroglyphs at this site are geometric designs, the entoptic patterns that were taken to represent signs of supernatural power when seen by a shaman during his vision quest. Because most shamans conducted these quests to obtain the power to cure illnesses, visions of these geometric patterns were probably believed to yield curing power. In addition to engraving them on the rocks, shamans also painted them on their ritual shirts. Because short term memory is impaired during visions, one reason for making the petroglyphs was simply to insure that the supernatural experience was not forgotten over time.



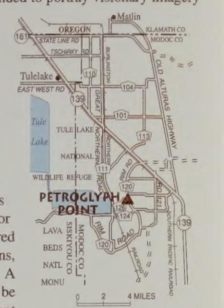
From Fort Bidwell take County Road (CR) 6 to the east. Once across Surprise Valley take Barrel Springs Rd (CR 1) left (northeast). Nine miles from this turn the road will intersect the Rock Creek wash. The petroglyphs are on the rock outcrops on the west side of the wash, north of the road (see BLM Surprise Valley/Barrel Springs Back Country Byway brochure; BLM Surprise Resource Area Map).

BLM Surprise Field Office
P.O. Box 460, 602 Cressler St, Cedarville, CA 96104
530-279-6101



25 - PETROGLYPH POINT

An important petroglyph site made by Modoc peoples is located on the Modoc Plateau, adjacent to Lava Beds National Monument. Although within the modern limits of California, this region is a southern extension of the Columbia Plateau. Its Native American inhabitants were culturally-allied to Plateau rather than California or Great Basin tribes.

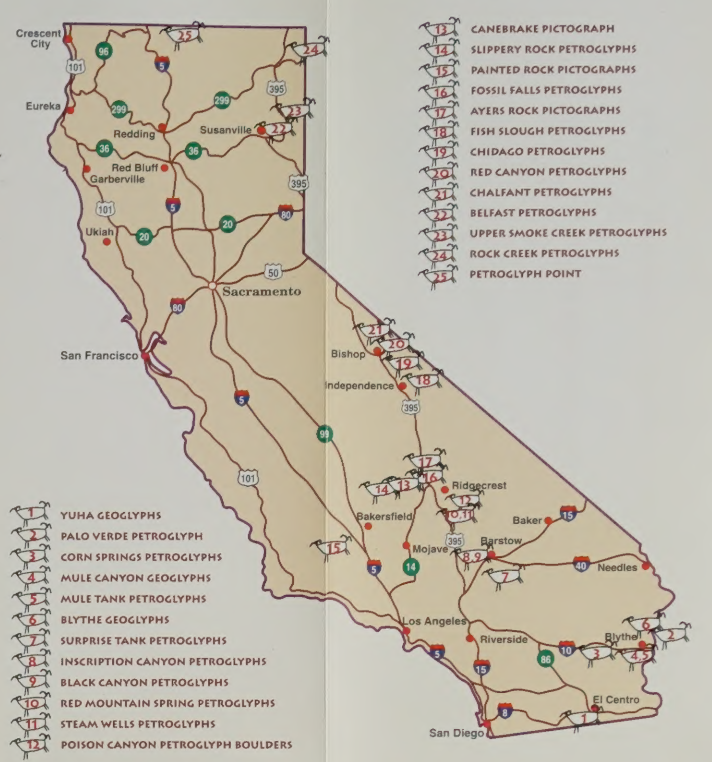


One important cultural difference between these three regions involved rock art. Though intended to portray visionary imagery in all areas, on the Plateau rock art was made by shamans, boys and girls during puberty initiations, and sometimes by non-shaman adults at times of major events in their lives, such as the birth of a child. In all cases the making of the motifs was tied to supernatural experiences. Even non-shamans could acquire a spirit helper or two, whose assistance was required for any kind of success; shamans, in contrast, might have a dozen. A given rock art site also might be used by any of these different peoples. The shamans' vision questing art may be combined with that made by puberty initiates and non-shaman adults. Not surprisingly, given the origin of the art in visionary imagery, the motifs are primarily entoptic patterns. Carved in soft tuff near the shore of Tule Lake, it is unlikely that these petroglyphs are more than a few thousand years old, and many may be much younger.

From Hwy 139 south of Tulelake, take County Road 111 south for about 5 miles, towards Lava Beds National Monument. Turn left on County Road 126 (dirt). The petroglyphs are spread across the base of a large cliff on the left side of the road.

BLM Alturas Field Office
708 W. 12th St, Alturas, CA 96101
530-233-4666

CALIFORNIA NATIVE ROCK ART SITES


Crescent City
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Redding
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Red Bluff
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Ukiah
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San Francisco
Bishop
Independence
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Barstow
Needles
Los Angeles
Riverside
Blythe
El Centro
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8 INSCRIPTION CANYON PETROGLYPHS
9 BLACK CANYON PETROGLYPHS
10 RED MOUNTAIN SPRING PETROGLYPHS
11 STEAM WELLS PETROGLYPHS
12 POISON CANYON PETROGLYPH BOULDERS

State Office Address
Bureau of Land Management
California State Office
2800 Cottage Way, W-1834
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 978-4400
web site: http://www.ca.blm.gov

RED CANYON PETROGLYPHS

Photo by David S. Whitley

For additional information about
California Indian Rock Art see:
"A Guide to Rock Art Sites"
by David S. Whitley
Mountain Press Publishing Co.
and
web site: http://www.ca.blm.gov/caso/Recreation/archtour/rockart.html

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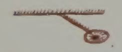
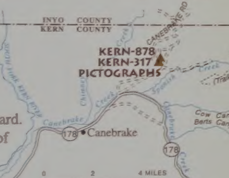


13 - CANEBRAKE PICTOGRAPHS

Two small pictograph sites are located in the Canebrake area of the south fork of the Valley of the Kern River, below Walker Pass. At the time of contact the area was occupied by the Tubatulabal. These are Kern-317 and Kern-878. Kern-317 contains a series of red painted geometric designs that are typical of the visionary imagery of a shaman's trance. Kern-878 is about 200 yeards north of Kern-317. It is situated in a small, low rock overhang surrounded by boulders, making it a little difficult to find. Once located, you will see bedrock mortars (grinding holes in the natural rock) adjacent to the paintings. Rock art was often made in the same places as mundane activities, like grinding acorns, though probably not at the same time.



The pictographs are painted in red. They include a circular design with internal "spokes," a long line with small tick marks along it, and two faint, stick-figure humans on the left side of the panel, along with other geometric images. Native Americans stated that shamans painted tick marks at some sites to record the number of spirit helpers they received, or the days they had spent on their vision quest. One of the human figures is shown with a long, thin exaggerated body. This most likely relates to a common physical feeling during a trance. The sense that the body stretches upward. The rapid fading of the pictographs suggest that both are less than 1000 years old, and maybe considerably younger.

Short hike required: From Site #11 walk north about 200 yards and slightly upslope along the mountainside. Your path will bisect one small drainage, with another immediately north of the site, which is within a group of boulders. A small BLM sign marks the location (see Desert Access Guide 5, Jawbone/Dove Spring).

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3801 Pegasus Ave., Bakersfield, CA 93308
805-391-6000

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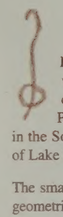
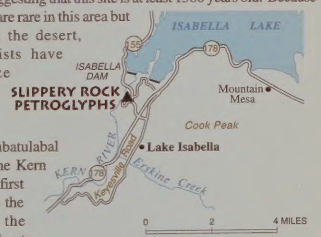


14 - SLIPPERY ROCK PETROGLYPHS

Pictographs generally are found in the mountains and valleys of western California, with petroglyphs usually concentrated in the eastern deserts. The Slippery Rock Petroglyphs are one of the exceptions: Engraved motifs in the Southern Sierra Nevada along the Kern River, just west of Lake Isabella.

The small panel of petroglyphs at this site contains a variety of geometric motifs — the entoptic patterns common to shaman's visionary imagery. Among them is a vertical line that, towards its lower end, bisects a small circle. Archaeologists interpret these as atlatls or throwing boards, weapons replaced by bows about 1500 years ago, suggesting that this site is at least 1500 years old. Because petroglyphs are rare in this area but common in the desert, archaeologists have hypothesize that this site may date to the period when the Tubatulabal peoples of the Kern River Valley first moved from the desert into the mountains about 5000 years ago.



Please Use Caution When Visiting This Site: The Kern River is extremely dangerous, with many lives lost every year to drowning. Please stay away from the river's edge.

The site is immediately below the Lake Isabella Dam, on the south side of the Kern River. From Isabella take Dam Rd (Hwy 155) north. Turn left onto a dirt road at sign "Keyesville South Recreation Site" (across highway from USFS Visitor Center). Stay to the right on the dirt road to its end at a cinder-block restroom. The petroglyphs are upstream (towards the dam), in the area of water-worn boulders, but inland of the "Danger Keep-Out" signs. The panel faces upstream, and is about 100 yards south of the Hwy 155 overcross.

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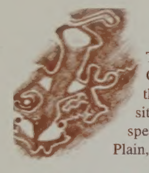
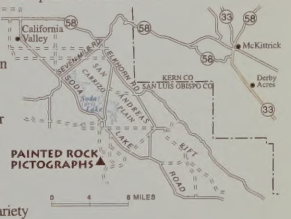


15 - PAINTED ROCK PICTOGRAPHS

The Chumash of the Santa Barbara Channel region are widely renowned for their elaborate, multi-colored pictograph sites. Perhaps their largest and once most spectacular site is located on the Carrizo Plain, in southeast San Luis Obispo County.

The site is in a large rock outcrop sitting on the plain. Shaped like a large "U", both its interior and the exterior sides have paintings. This suggests that, unlike most pictograph sites, Painted Rock was used by numerous shamans, perhaps for many centuries or even millennia.

Painted Rock was badly vandalized in the 1920s, with many of the motifs shot-up or covered by graffiti — ruining one of the world's greatest cultural heritage sites. Many of the smaller paintings and portions of the larger pictographs are still visible, though, allowing the visitor to appreciate the truly spectacular imagery that was once painted at this locale.



In addition to the geometric images so common at rock art sites, Painted Rock contains a number of human figures, snakes (the spirit helper for Rattlesnake Shamans) and a variety of aquatic images: Turtles and seals, apparently references to the fact that the shaman's trance was sometimes described as a visit underwater.

Short hike required: Painted Rock is located off Soda Lake Rd south of California Valley at Hwy 58. A sign marks the turn-off. Note that the site area is closed during raptor nesting season. Call the Goodwin Educational Center, at the site, for information, at 805-475-2131.

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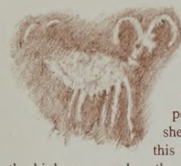


16 - FOSSIL FALLS PETROGLYPHS

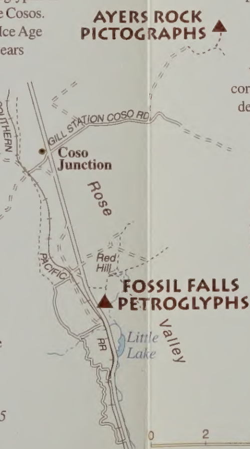
The Coso Range, historical home of the Coso Shoshone, contains one of the largest concentrations of petroglyphs in the world. Bighorn sheep petroglyphs are very common in this art. Native Americans stated that the bighorn served as the special spirit helper for the Rain Shaman, and that Paiute and Shoshone shamans came from eastern California, Nevada and Utah to obtain rain-making power in the Cosos.

Most of the Coso sites lie within the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, but a small example of Coso petroglyphs is found at Fossil Falls, at the western edge of the Cosos. The falls are a water-sculpted remnant of an Ice Age river that dried-up about 6 or 7 thousand years ago. Sometime in the last 1000 years, shamans conducted vision quests in the ancient rocky streambed, recording their visionary experiences by making petroglyphs of bighorns and geometric images, the entoptic designs that commonly occur in a trance.

Short hike required: Fossil Falls is located just east of Hwy 395, north of Little Lake. From Hwy 395, turn east onto Cinder Road and follow the BLM signs to the campground. A trail leads to the top of the ancient falls. The petroglyphs are in two small rock alcoves just below the very top of the falls (see Desert Access Guide 4, Ridgecrest).

BLM Ridgecrest Field Office
300 S. Richmond Rd, Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-384-5400

**NATIVE CALIFORNIA ROCK ART IS A LEGACY
WE ALL SHARE
AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS PRESERVATION**



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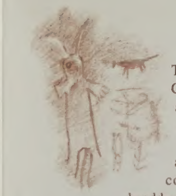

17 - AYERS ROCK PICTOGRAPHS

The Coso Shoshone are renowned for the Coso petroglyphs, but they sometimes also made pictographs. One of their most spectacular painted sites is Ayers Rock, which is painted in red, orange, purple and black. One panel of these paintings contains two large shamans with headdresses, a small animal (perhaps a skunk), handprints and other designs. A second panel shows bighorn sheep, a large trumpeting elk, and a horse and rider, indicating that the site was made in the last 150 years. It has been suggested that Ayers Rock was painted by the last Coso rain shaman, who lived in the southern Sierra Nevada but came to the Cosos to conduct rain-making rituals, which required a bighorn sheep spirit helper like those painted at the site. He was also said to have an elk spirit helper, which is shown at the site. If this identification is correct, Ayers Rock was probably painted in the first few decades of the twentieth century, and may represent the last example of rain-making in this region.

Short hike required: Ayers Rock is located east of Hwy 395, north of the Little Lake Site. From Hwy 395, turn east on Coso Rd at the Coso Junction Rest Stop. Head east on this road for about 3.7 miles, then turn north (left) onto a smaller dirt road leading up into the hills. About 4.3 miles down this second road you will encounter a locked gate to a mine; a smaller dirt road will be on your left at the gate, with a sign directing you to the pictographs. Take this side-road to the parking lot. A marked trail leads to the site, which is about a quarter-mile further (see Desert Access Guide 2, Panamint). During the 1960's unauthorized excavations took place here. You can see the results on your visit.

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300 S. Richmond Rd, Ridgecrest, CA 93555
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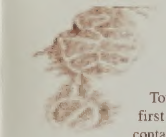

18 - FISH SLOUGH PETROGLYPHS

Four petroglyph sites are located east of Bishop, on the "Bishop Petroglyph Loop Tour", in Owens Valley Paiute territory. The first of these is Fish Slough, a small site containing a few dozen motifs. Like the other sites in this area, these were made on volcanic tuff, a relatively soft stone that is easy to engrave. The relative softness of this rock has an important implication. Because it erodes fairly quickly, the petroglyphs made on it are unlikely to be very ancient. Our best estimate is that these petroglyphs are 1000 years old, or less.

All of the motifs at this site are geometric designs, probably representing the entoptic patterns that are common in shamans' visionary images. Because most of these geometric visions are idiosyncratic to the individual shaman, we cannot know what specific symbolism most of them held, beyond the general sense that they were signs of power. Circles with bisecting lines are common at this site. These may have represented atlatls (throwing boards), if the vertical bisecting lines are long, and the circles small (representing finger holds on the weapon) and located at the lower end. Shamans used weapons in their rituals and were said to have visions of them during their vision quests. Alternatively, bisected circle motifs may represent vulva-forms (see Site #21) when the lines are the same length as the diameter of the circle.

As is common at many sites, the rocks at Fish Slough contain both petroglyphs and evidence of "mundane" activities: Grinding sticks, used to grind seeds and nuts for food. The juxtaposition of religious (making petroglyphs) and non-religious activities (grinding food plants) at this site might seem inappropriate to us. But in Native American terms the distinction between religious and non-religious activities was not a question of place, but of time: Each could be conducted at the same location, though perhaps at different periods of the day, or different seasons of the year.

At the request of the local Native American community, maps and directions to the sites on the Bishop Petroglyph Loop may only be obtained in person at the BLM office.

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785 North Main St, Suite E, Bishop, CA 93514
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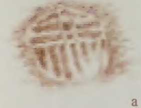

19 - CHIDAGO PETROGLYPHS

The second site on the Bishop Petroglyph Loop is Chidago, located on a large rock outcrop next to the road. Typical of other sites in Northern Paiute territory, the majority of the motifs are geometric designs or entoptic patterns seen by shamans during their visions. These included grids and checkerboards, spirals and concentric circles, dot and tick patterns, sets of parallel or meandering lines, zigzags and nested curves, and endless combinations of these patterns.

Native Americans had no common interpretation for many of these motifs, because they were idiosyncratic. But the rattlesnake was widely symbolized as either a zigzag or a "diamond-chain", meaning that visions of these entoptic patterns were understood as visions of snakes. The reason for this symbolism is logical: Zigzag is the track left in the sand by the sidewinder; diamond-chain is the scale pattern on the back of the diamondback rattlesnake.

Another widely understood entoptic pattern is the spiral or concentric circle. This was believed to represent the whirlwind, which was thought to carry a shaman into the supernatural. The whirlwind did this by concentrating supernatural power. Because the shaman was also believed to have this ability, human figures are sometimes shown with concentric circles or spirals for faces, signaling that they are images of the shaman.

Another common petroglyph, seen at this site, is a lizard motif. The shaman was believed able to enter the supernatural in his trance by going into cracks in the rock at rock art sites, which were believed portals to the supernatural. Because lizards are commonly seen darting in and out of cracks in the rock, they were thought to be a messenger between the natural and supernatural worlds.

At the request of the local Native American community, maps and directions to the sites on the Bishop Petroglyph Loop may only be obtained in person at the BLM office.

BLM Bishop Field Office
785 North Main St, Suite E, Bishop, CA 93514
760-872-4881

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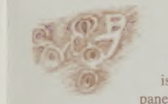

20 - RED CANYON PETROGLYPHS

The third site on the petroglyph loop is the largest. Notable at this site is a panel containing bighorn petroglyphs. As in the Coso Range (see Site #16), many Native American groups associated the bighorn with rain shamanism, making the bighorn the special spirit helper for the shaman with weather control power. Perhaps for this reason the bighorn is the most common identifiable animal in western North American rock art, as opposed to species like the deer, which were more important as food resources and less commonly used as religious symbols.

In addition to the numerous geometric/entoptic designs that are present at every rock art site, Red Canyon has a large number of human hand and foot prints and bear tracks. These are logical graphical symbols for hunting peoples, who commonly tracked animals across the land, and equated animals with these kinds of signs. Notable in the religion of the Shoshone and Paiute is the belief that certain shamans' spirit helpers, known as "rock" or water baby," often left their tracks, especially near water holes where they lived. A sighting of this spirit or his tracks was said to represent a supernatural experience. The artist who made these print petroglyphs may well have had water baby as his spirit helper.

At the request of the local Native American community, maps and directions to the sites on the Bishop Petroglyph Loop may only be obtained in person at the BLM office.

BLM Bishop Field Office
785 North Main St, Suite E, Bishop, CA 93514
760-872-4881

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California Native American Heritage Commission
California Office of Historic Preservation
Designed by Maria Kammerer and May Wakabayashi
Graphics by May Wakabayashi

BLM/CA/GI-2000/006+8140

CARE FOR AND RESPECT THIS ART

Native California rock art provides us with a unique window into American Indian rituals, beliefs, and artistic abilities. It is a heritage that we all should care for and respect. A few simple guidelines to follow while visiting sites will help preserve them for future generations to enjoy:

- Please never touch, spray water on, or chalk designs.
- Please never leave trash at sites. Some are religious places to Native Californians, and should be treated the same way we treat our churches.
- Please watch your children while visiting the sites. It is important that they visit these sites, so they will learn to appreciate them, but children can be "high impact" visitors. They may need careful instructions in proper behavior during their visits.
- If you see others vandalizing sites or accidentally hurting the art, please report them to a BLM ranger.

"The term rock art does not begin to adequately explain the images made by Native Americans thousands of years ago. These paintings and petroglyphs are at the root of our scattered history, an expression of spiritual beliefs, and an enduring and tangible connection to our ancestors."

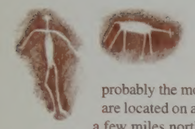
Larry Myers, Executive Secretary
California Native American Heritage Commission

"Whether as a means of telling stories or recording places and events that influenced their lives, rock art provides an outward expression of Native American existence in California--a lasting image of the people whose cultural heritage it represents with an opportunity for each of us to glimpse at one important aspect of California's rich cultural heritage."

Daniel Abeyta, Acting State Historic Preservation Officer

"California is blessed with world class archaeological resources, especially rock art left by its native inhabitants. Please enjoy your experience at these sites and appreciate these very special public resources and our message of stewardship."

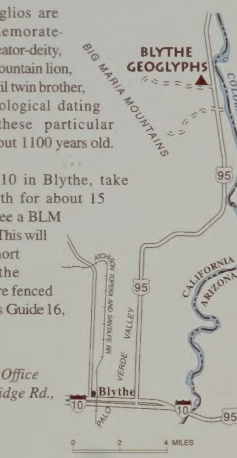
Mike Pool, California State Director
Bureau of Land Management



6 - BLYTHE GEOGLYPHS

The Blythe "Giant Figures", probably the most famous geoglyphs in America, are located on a terrace above the Colorado River a few miles north of Blythe. These giant intaglios include human figures more than 60 feet long, a mountain lion and a geometric pattern. Made by Yuman speaking tribes, geoglyphs such as these were used during ritual pilgrimages made along the Colorado River from the Land of the Dead, at the south, to the place of creation, at the northern end. Intaglios were created at the locations of mythic events, and were intended to portray the mythic beings whose actions occurred at these spots.

The Blythe intaglios are said to commemorate Mastamho, the creator-deity, his spirit helper, mountain lion, and perhaps his evil twin brother, Kaatar. Archaeological dating suggests that these particular geoglyphs are about 1100 years old.

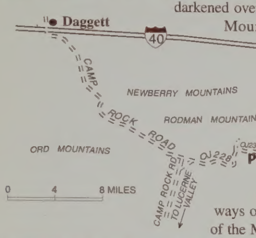


From Interstate 10 in Blythe, take Highway 95 north for about 15 miles. You will see a BLM sign on your left. This will lead you up a short dirt road to the intaglios, which are fenced (see Desert Access Guide 16, Parker/Blythe).

BLM Yuma Field Office
2555 East Gila Ridge Rd.,
Yuma, AZ 85365
520-317-3200

7 - SURPRISE TANK PETROGLYPHS

Many petroglyph sites appear to have been used for thousands of years, suggesting that Native Californian religion is one of the oldest and most long-lived in the world. Support for this is found at the Surprise Tank Petroglyphs, Rodman Mountains. This site has engravings of extinct fauna tentatively identified as over 11,000 years old, using archaeological dating techniques, a conclusion supported by the great variability in the degree that different petroglyphs have darkened over time. The Rodman Mountains, southeast of Barstow, were occupied by the Vanyume, a Native American group typical in many ways of the hunter-gatherers of the Mojave Desert. Made by shamans after vision quests, their rock art portrays the visionary imagery of the supernatural world. Particularly common here are zigzags, made by Rattlesnake Shamans to symbolize their spirit helpers. A short walk in most directions will allow you to explore the Rodman Mountains Wilderness Area and National Register Archeological District.

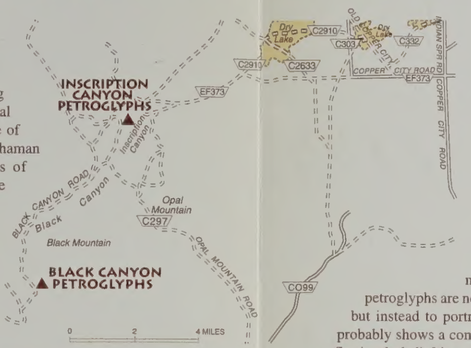


Four-wheel drive recommended: From Daggett, go east on the south frontage road along Interstate 40, which turns into Camp Rock Rd. Take Camp Rock Rd until it makes a hard right turn south; at this intersection head straight on BLM Route OJ228 (Cinder Cone Rd). Take this route to the intersection of OJ223 and turn right. Surprise Tank is approximately 1.8 miles down OJ223. A large open flat serves as the parking lot. The site is directly ahead (east) in the stream bed but is not visible until you are upon it. A fenced area containing a possible rock alignment and intaglio is located a few dozen yards north of OJ223, about midway between Cinder Cone Road and Surprise Tank (see Desert Access Guide 11, Johnson Valley).

BLM Barstow Field Office
2601 Barstow Rd., Barstow, CA 92311
760-252-6000

8 - INSCRIPTION CANYON PETROGLYPHS

The Black Mountain area, northwest of Barstow, contains one of the biggest petroglyph concentrations in the Mojave Desert. Inscription Canyon is its most spectacular site. Probably made by Kawaiisu or Southern Paiute shamans, the site depicts the visionary imagery of numerous individuals, including rain shamans whose special spirit helper was the bighorn sheep. Also present are petroglyphs known as "patterned body anthropomorphs": human figures wearing elaborately decorated ritual shirts. These were made of animal hides, which the shaman painted with his "signs of supernatural power," the geometric patterns that he also saw during his trance. Like most sites, the majority of the motifs are these geometric patterns that were thought signs of power.



Petroglyphs are located along both sides of a small N-S canyon, as well as on both sides of the canyon entrance. Look for the bighorn petroglyph just west of the canyon entrance. This shows the sheep "emerging" out of a complex herringbone pattern. Compositions like this, mixing geometric and figurative designs are typical of shamans' visionary imagery.

Four-wheel drive recommended (especially during wet weather): From Barstow take Irwin Rd north to Copper City Rd. Turn left. At BLM Route EF373 turn left again. Inscription Canyon is on your left about 10 miles after the turn, and is fenced (see Desert Access Guide 7, Red Mountain).

BLM Barstow Field Office
2601 Barstow Rd., Barstow, CA 92311
760-252-6000

9 - BLACK CANYON PETROGLYPHS

A second site in the Black Mountain area is Black Canyon, a concentration of petroglyphs along both sides of steeply-sided basalt cliffs, cut by a wash and dirt road. Motifs extend almost to the top of the cliffs on both sides of the canyon. As at Site #8, these were probably made by Kawaiisu or Southern Paiute shamans at the conclusion of their vision quests.

On the north side of the canyon you may notice a small bighorn petroglyph a few feet above eye-level. An interesting feature of this motif is the way that the feet are shown: flat-footed, not cloven-hoofed like a true bighorn. This motif illustrates the fact that these petroglyphs are not intended to show real animals but instead to portray spirit beings. This example probably shows a combination of a human and sheep, reflecting the belief that a shaman transformed into his spirit helper when he entered the supernatural.

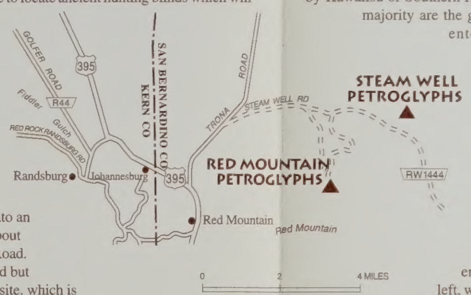
Four-wheel drive recommended (especially during wet weather): From Site #7 continue west on BLM Route EF373 as it skirts the northern and then western sides of Black Mountain. Turn left at BLM Route C283, down a long canyon wash. The petroglyphs are marked by a sign on your right (see Desert Access Guide 7, Red Mountain).

BLM Barstow Field Office
2601 Barstow Rd., Barstow, CA 92311
760-252-6000

THIS BROCHURE FIRST DEBUTED AT THE SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

10 - RED MOUNTAIN PETROGLYPHS

Although some Mojave Desert petroglyph sites are large, like Sites #8 and #9, the typical rock art site is much smaller and may only have a few engravings. The Red Mountain Petroglyph site, near Red Mountain, is a good example of these smaller sites, which reflect the fact that many perhaps were made and used by a single shaman. Petroglyphs at this site are exclusively geometric patterns, representing the entoptic images that were perceived during a shaman's vision. How these were interpreted probably varied between shamans, who may have placed specific meaning on each different pattern. But in a general way they were all considered signs of supernatural power, signaling that a shaman had entered the supernatural and had received his power. A shaman often painted his ritual items with these same geometric designs. If you look closely you may be able to locate ancient hunting blinds which will make this trip extra special.



Four-wheel drive required: From Hwy 395 head north on Trona Road. Turn right off this paved road at BLM Route RM1444. Turn right (south) off RM1444 onto an unmarked jeep track about 2.3 miles from Trona Road. This track winds around but eventually leads to the site, which is about 1.25 miles south of RM1444. The site area is fenced and signed. The petroglyphs are located on a small basalt outcrop across an arroyo from a concrete guzzler that is about 100 yards beyond the fence (see Desert Access Guide 7, Red Mountain).

BLM Ridgecrest Field Office
300 S. Richmond Rd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-384-5400

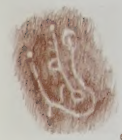
11 - STEAM WELLS PETROGLYPHS

The Steam Wells Petroglyphs are located a few miles beyond Site #6. They are easy to reach with a 2-wheel drive vehicle, although a short but easy hike off the road into the Golden Valley Wilderness Area is required. Located at a spring, these petroglyphs reflect the Native American belief that permanent water sources are inhabited by supernatural spirits and, thus, were good places for a shaman's vision quest. Since water was critical to desert peoples, rock art sites were sometimes located near villages.

The petroglyphs at Steam Wells are thought to have been made by Kawaiisu or Southern Paiute shamans. As at most sites, the majority are the geometric patterns, representing the entoptic visions seen during the shaman's trance, which were taken to represent supernatural power. The site is located on major rock art at the spring. They are protected by visible signage.

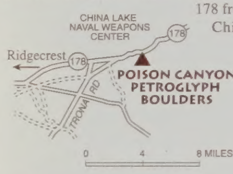
Short hike required: From Trona Road off Hwy 395 north of Red Mountain, take BLM Route RM1444 to the east. About 4.1 miles from Trona Road you will encounter another dirt road on your left, which is now closed to vehicles. Hike north on this road about 0.4 miles, to an intersection with another road, again on your left. The petroglyphs are about 0.2 miles up this last road (see Desert Access Guide 7, Red Mountain). Remember this site is inside the Golden Valley Wilderness.

BLM Ridgecrest Field Office
300 S. Richmond Rd., Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-384-5400



12 - POISON CANYON PETROGLYPH BOULDERS

A good example of the many small petroglyph sites in the Coso Range region is Poison Canyon. Two boulders are decorated with these engravings at this location. In both cases the motifs are geometric designs, probably the entoptic patterns that shamans saw during their visionary experience. One of these is a star-burst like engraving, another is a shield-like pattern; the remainder are indistinguishable in form. Many people see one or two snake-like figures on the most southerly boulder. The concentration of rock art sites in the Coso region is archaeological evidence of the importance of this area for shamans vision quests. Although Poison Canyon falls within the territory of the Kawaiisu Indians, historical records also indicate that Shosone and Northern and Southern Paiute peoples came to this region for vision quests and healing rituals.


CHINA LAKE NAVAL WEAPONS CENTER
178
Ridgecrest
178
TRONA RD
POISON CANYON PETROGLYPH BOULDERS
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8 MILES

Short hike required: From Ridgecrest go east on Highway 178 from the intersection of China Lake Boulevard and Ridgecrest Boulevard (Highway 178). At approximately 9.5 miles Trona Road intersects Highway 178 from the South. Red Mountain is 22 miles to the south via Trona Road. Continue east on Highway 178. You will enter Poison Canyon at approximately 12.5 miles. Begin to slow down and at approximate mile 13 pull over and park on the pavement on the flood control dike. Stop before you drive on the sand. The west-facing petroglyphs are on two prominent boulders approximately 200 feet south of the dike. It is accessible by 2 wheel drive vehicles if you avoid the sand. If you decide to drive in the wash you must have 4 wheel drive. There are 19th century mining adits and dugouts along the wash but there are no additional petroglyphs.

BLM Ridgecrest Field Office
300 S. Richmond Road, Ridgecrest, CA 93555
760-384-5400

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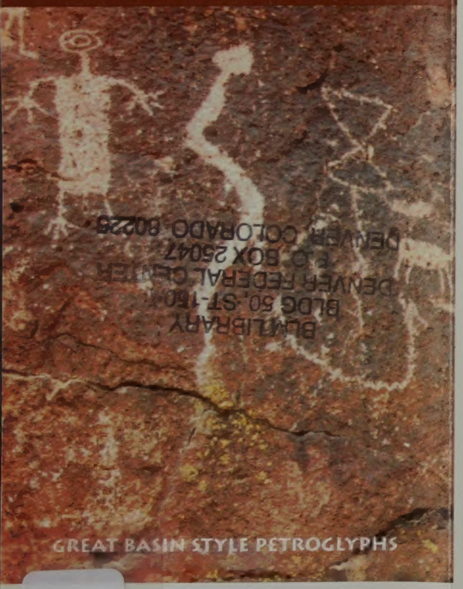
BLM ROCK ART OF NATIVE CALIFORNIA

A Guide to Rock Art Sites on BLM Lands in California

VISITOR'S GUIDE



GREAT BASIN STYLE PETROGLYPHS

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CALIFORNIA ROCK ART IS A WINDOW INTO INDIAN LIFEWAYS

Native Californian rock art is a fragile artistic and religious legacy of our American Indian forebears. Some rock art sites on California BLM lands are open to the public. This guide provides directions to these sites, which start near the Mexico border and extend almost to Oregon. It also relates some of the information Native Californians have revealed about this art, and certain facts archaeologists have discovered.

Many of these sites are in relatively remote desert areas. Please check on road conditions with the local BLM field office. Unless noted otherwise, these sites can be reached with a two-wheel drive vehicle.

When visiting these sites please remember that a few moments of inconsiderate behavior can destroy what has been preserved for thousands of years. Make sure that your children's grandchildren will also be able to visit and enjoy these sites. We need these sites to survive into the next millinium.

Native Californians Made Three Kinds of Rock Art

Pictographs are rock paintings, made from mineral earths like red ocher mixed with oil, and applied to rock surfaces with the fingers or an animal tail brush. *Petroglyphs* are rock engravings, made by using a fist-sized stone cobble to hammer or peck a design into a rock surface. *Geoglyphs* or *intaglios* are images that have been scraped into a dark desert pavement, leaving a design in the lighter soil that is below. Geoglyphs also occur as alignments of rocks. Pictographs are most common in the coastal ranges and Sierra Nevada; petroglyphs are usually found in the desert, as are the geoglyphs, which are often located near the Colorado River.

Rock Art Dates from the Ice Age Into the 19th Century

Native Californians state that some rock art sites were made in the last 100 years. Occasional depictions of horses and riders confirm that some of the art is recent: these could only be drawn after Euro-American contact in the 18th century. Most pictographs are probably less than 2000 years old; they are often too fragile to survive much longer. Other rock art is much older. Petroglyphs of *atlatls* or throwing boards, shown as a small circle bisected by a long vertical line, must be greater than 1500 years old, because the bow replaced this earlier weapon at that time. Archaeological dating techniques suggest that some petroglyphs may have been made during the Ice Age (or Pleistocene), over 10,000 years ago, though most are more recent. Differences in the darkness of the petroglyphs at many sites suggest that the motifs vary greatly in age. Dating techniques also suggest that some geoglyphs are as much as 3000 years old, while others may have been made much more recently.

Rock Art Was Made By Shamans and Ritual Initiates

Some Native Californians have told archaeologists who made the art, and what it portrays. In many areas of the state, shaman or medicine men made rock art to preserve a record of their visionary trances. Shaman used fasting and native tobacco to enter a trance during ritual vision quests. These were believed visits to the supernatural, where the shaman obtained supernatural power, often in the form of animal spirit helpers. Shamans also sought visions to cure, make rain, find lost objects or bewitch an enemy.

Many pictographs and petroglyphs appear to be geometric designs. These were visionary images that served as "signs of supernatural power." Archaeologists call these geometric images *entoptics* ("behind the eye") because they represent light patterns that are generated by our nervous system during a trance. Animal figures were animal spirit helpers; human designs were images of the shaman or other humanlike spirits seen in the vision. Because the shaman was believed able to change into his spirit helper while in the supernatural, some motifs show a human transforming into a spirit animal.

In southwestern California, along the Colorado River, and on the Modoc Plateau, rock art was also made by youngsters during puberty initiations. Like the shamans, these initiates too sought spirit helpers in visionary trances, and portrayed them in their art. Unlike other rock art, Colorado River intaglios were made to portray mythic events at locations where these events were said to have occurred. They were used in ritual pilgrimages which traced the path of the mythic past across the landscape.

Native Californian rock art was made in different ways. Yet the artistic symbolism was always complex and sophisticated, reflecting the complex religious beliefs of which it is a part.

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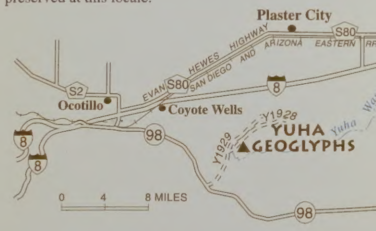
1 - YUHA GEOGLYPHS

Located near the Mexican border in the Yuha Desert, east of Calexico, the Yuha Geoglyphs are a rare example of intaglios. Made by scraping away the desert pavement of darkened pebbles to reveal the lighter sand below, this site portrays an intricate pattern of geometric designs. Geoglyph sites like this were probably used in rituals commemorating myths, and for purification with ceremonial dances. Many geoglyphs are found in places said to be where the mythic events occurred.

The Yuha Geoglyphs were nearly destroyed by vandals in 1975. Using aerial photos and maps, they were carefully reconstructed by Imperial Valley College and the BLM in 1981. They have been vandalized once again but an examination of the ground will reveal the faint but interesting ritual designs that are still preserved at this locale.



The Yuha Geoglyphs are located north of Hwy 98 about 25 miles east of Calexico, on BLM Route Y1928 (dirt road) about two miles north of 98 (see Desert Access Guide 22, Imperial Valley South). Over fifteen other geoglyph sites can be found in the area. All geoglyphs in the Colorado Desert are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

BLM El Centro Field Office
1661 S. 4th St., El Centro, CA 92243
760-337-4400

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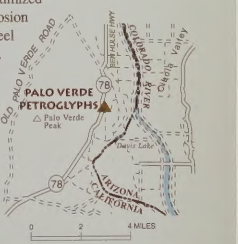
2 - PALO VERDE PETROGLYPH

The riverine Yumans of southeastern California mostly depicted in geoglyph form the mythical images described in their creation stories. The Blythe Giants, the Twins, Mountain Lion, and numerous other animal figures as well as entopic designs are found at nearly predictable intervals along the banks of Colorado River. What is noticeably missing is rock art.

The Palo Verde rock art site is but fifty yards from Highway 78. Yet, being within a sunken amphitheater of sandstone, it is hidden from travelers' view. The sole access is a narrow dirt path that for two hundred yards wiggles its way through thick brush until the world seems suddenly to thrust one into an ancient and eroded round of barren red sandstone. The visitor is aware of being life's sole representative in this strange desert scape. But everywhere one looks it is clear that others had been here eons ago, apparently finding in this unique basin a sacredness calling for spiritual signature.

The Palo Verde site has been victimized by nature as well as vandals. Erosion has removed panels while steel chisels have made new ones. But quadrupeds, snakes, circles, cupules, shamans, and many images that have faded into their own past cover most vertical facings. An Indian Trail that is traceable for nearly thirty miles passes through this site, its way worn smooth across sandstone slabs. The best preserved petroglyphs are on the southern outside wall of the basin. In bold and sharp relief a shaman dominates a panel of smaller glyphs. This, like neighboring panels along a faulted line, has slipped away from its parental cliff and in time will fully crumble.



This site is seven miles south of Palo Verde, and along the final ridge that opens into Palo Verde Valley.

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1661 S. 4th Street, El Centro, CA 92243
760-337-4400

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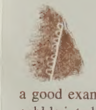
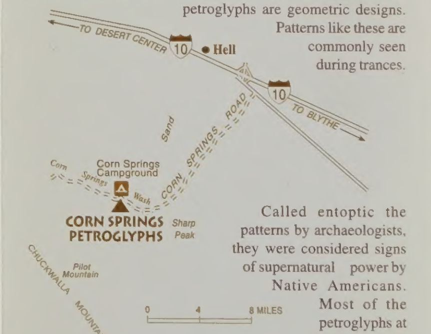


3 - CORN SPRINGS PETROGLYPHS

Located in the Chuckwalla Mountains in the Colorado Desert, the Corn Springs Petroglyphs are a good example of rock art engraved or pecked with a stone cobble into boulder surfaces. The site is in a transitional region between the Colorado River-dwelling Mojave peoples, to the east, and the desert- living Cahuilla, to the west. The petroglyphs are believed to have been created by shamans at the conclusion of their vision quests, with the petroglyphs portraying the visions that the shamans had of the supernatural. Many of the petroglyphs are geometric designs. Patterns like these are commonly seen during trances.



Called entoptic the patterns by archaeologists, they were considered signs of supernatural power by Native Americans. Most of the petroglyphs at Corn Springs appear fairly recent, perhaps less than 1000 years old, although some may be much older.

The petroglyphs are found on both sides of the wash within the Corn Springs Campground. This is about 7 miles south of Interstate 10 on Corn Springs Road, 9 miles east of Desert Center (see Desert Access Guide 18, Chuckwalla).

BLM Palm Springs - South Coast Field Office
690 Garnet Ave., North Palm Springs, CA 92258
760-251-4800

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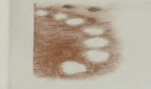
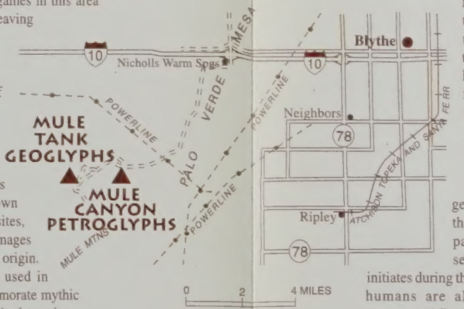


4 - MULE CANYON GEOGLYPHS

Colorado Desert contains many mysteries, none is more enigmatic than the Mule Canyon Geoglyphs. Located about 10 miles southwest of Blythe, they consist of clusters of circles cleared in the desert pavement, and arrayed in horseshoe-like patterns. Prior to World War II, an archaeologist passed through this region and made no note of these designs, although he recorded a dance circle and trail at this location. When combined with the fact that no other intaglio sites resemble the patterns seen here, many archaeologists have concluded that these must be recent creations. The likely candidate for this is General George Patton's troops, who conducted war games in this area during World War II, often leaving their tracks on the ground.

Other archaeologists have interviewed former members of Patton's troops, and looked at other known sites used during the war games. They have concluded that the Mule Canyon Geoglyphs bear no resemblance to known examples of Patton's campsites, and that the Mule Canyon images may be Native American in origin. If so, they may have been used in group ceremonies to commemorate mythic events, like other geoglyphs in the region.



Four-wheel drive required: Mule Canyon is located about 5 miles southwest of the Mesa Verde exit off Interstate 10, 7 miles west of Blythe. Head west on the south frontage road (Blythe Way) along the highway. After about 1 mile turn left down a dirt road bordered by a power line. Take this for about 2 miles to another road trending southwest towards the Mule Mountains. Look for a fenced area on the northeast side of the mountains, about 1 mile west of a NW-SE trending power line (see Desert Access Guide 16, Parker/Blythe).

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690 Garnet Ave., North Palm Springs, CA 92258
760-251-4800

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5 - MULE TANK PETROGLYPHS

In many parts of the hot and dry Colorado Desert, natural tanks provided important water sources for Native Americans. These tanks are depressions in the rocks or in stream channels that collect and hold water. Mule Tank, located about 14 miles west of Blythe, is a good example. Because sources of water were often used as ritual locations, many of the tanks have rock art. The rock art at Mule Tank consists of a number of petroglyph panels. Because this area was transitional between Native American groups living along the Colorado River and those restricted to the interior desert, we are uncertain which group made this rock art. An Indian trail has been identified that runs from this site to Corn Springs (see site #3), showing that it was connected with areas to the west.

Most of the petroglyphs are geometric patterns, representing the visionary images or entoptic patterns that were commonly seen by shamans and puberty initiates during their trances. A few stick-figure humans are also present, some having pronounced fingers and toes, and one probably representing a rare example of a female — a female shaman. These petroglyphs are characteristic of the rock art of the Colorado Desert. Most of the motifs appear relatively young — at most 2000 years in age — but some may be a few thousand years older.

Four-wheel drive required: Mule Tank is about 1.8 miles west/southwest of the Mule Canyon Geoglyphs. From the geoglyphs take the dirt road to the west, staying on the south side of the wash (see Desert Access Guide 16, Parker/Blythe).

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CARE FOR AND RESPECT THIS ART

Native California rock art provides us with a unique window into American Indian rituals, beliefs, and artistic abilities. It is a heritage that we all should care for and respect. A few simple guidelines to follow while visiting sites will help preserve them for future generations to enjoy:

- Please never touch, spray water on, or chalk designs.
- Please never leave trash at sites. Some are religious places to Native Californians, and should be treated the same way we treat our churches.
- Please watch your children while visiting the sites. It is important that they visit these sites, so they will learn to appreciate them, but children can be "high impact" visitors. They may need careful instructions in proper behavior during their visits.
- If you see others vandalizing sites or accidentally hurting the art, please report them to a BLM ranger.

"The term rock art does not begin to adequately explain the images made by Native Americans thousands of years ago. These paintings and petroglyphs are at the root of our scattered history, an expression of spiritual beliefs, and an enduring and tangible connection to our ancestors."

Larry Myers, Executive Secretary
California Native American Heritage Commission

"Whether as a means of telling stories or recording places and events that influenced their lives, rock art provides an outward expression of Native American existence in California--a lasting image of the people whose cultural heritage it represents with an opportunity for each of us to glimpse at one important aspect of California's rich cultural heritage."

Daniel Abeyta, Acting State Historic Preservation Officer

"California is blessed with world class archaeological resources, especially rock art left by its native inhabitants. Please enjoy your experience at these sites and appreciate these very special public resources and our message of stewardship."

Mike Pool, California State Director
Bureau of Land Management